



Korea: The Divided Peninsula

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A State of Contradiction...

The DPRK exists simultaneously in US foreign policy as a daunting threat less stable than any other potential adversary and a vague afterthought. What is the responsibility of the international community?

Human Rights Abuses

The DPRK is charged by the UN with “systematic, widespread, and gross human rights violations committed by the government included murder, enslavement, torture, imprisonment, rape, forced abortion, and other sexual violence, and constituted crimes against humanity”. As the DPRK provides no information on birth, death, crime, or imprisonment rates, accusations are based on information from defectors and what little private journalism takes place. As outlined by the Declaration of Human Rights, humanitarian intervention to protect the rights of individuals is necessitated by states that do not protect or commit violations against these rights.

Nuclear Threat

While it is not clear exactly how much nuclear ability the DPRK has, it is clear from their last two tests in 2016 that the country has considerable ballistic missile power if not thermal nucleotide ability. Besides explosives capabilities, the DPRK has been asses by both the US Secretary of Defense and the Republic of Korea (ROK) Ministry of Defense to contain shocking amounts of biological weapons, and chemical weapons estimating between 2,500 and 5,000 metric tons. Military confrontation with North Korea, even against the powers of the US and the ROK military forces, could be very high casualty.

Cult of Personality

The state of North Korea is inseparable from the leadership of the Kim family from Kim Il-Sung the founder and revered father, to Kim Jon-il his son, to the current Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un. One of the biggest displays of North Korean propaganda is the Mass Games annual performance in honor of Kim Il-Sung’s birthday since 1946. The Mass Games include thousands of performers synchronized in dance, gymnastics, and dramas, with the 2002 Arirang Games including “Almost 200 million man hours were spent preparing and performing the show. In all, the 90 performances over a four-month period were viewed live by four million people”.



Command Economy

In the 1990s as the DPRK suffered famine and economic depression and again from 2009 to 2011 when Kim Jong-Il was dying and passing the regime on to his son Kim Jong-Un, the common narrative that the country was on the brink of collapse dominated perspectives of the future of North Korea. However, there is time and again an unexpected stability of the DPRK, and as their fellow communist countries such as the USSR fell or, such as Vietnam and China, adapted to in some regards to capitalism and global trade in a way the DPRK has not. So far in their more than 60 years as an independent state, the DPRK has neither collapsed on their own nor demonstrated enough threat for the global community to intervene and force regime change. Much of this stability is granted by China’s consistent support, but there are other ways the international community is involved in direct or indirect support of the DPRK and many manners in which the DPRK acts as a member of the international system.

Conclusions:

The most effective means of reducing security threat and creating peace is through diplomatic relations. The collapse of the DPRK, especially if it entails a violent change of power or even economic destitution is undesirable on all fronts. For China and other historic supporters of the DPRK as well as for the ROK and its allies, the flood of refugees and economic pressure that collapse represents is more than daunting. For the people of North Korea such a conclusion is also grim. Even if collapse were a desirable option it may prove to be a difficult and unlikely progression of events.

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